

CAHS

The Connecticut Association for Human Services
110 Bartholomew Avenue - Suite 4030
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Michael Rohde, President
James P. Horan, Executive Director
860.951.2212 x 235
860.951.6511 (fax)

Testimony before the Select Committee on Children

Subject Matter: Children in the Recession

H.B. No. 5630: An Act Concerning Children in the Recession

Submitted by Sherry Linton, Early Care and Education Policy Analyst

The Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) would like to thank Senator Musto, Representative Urban and the members of the Select Committee on Children for the opportunity to testify in favor of H.B.5630. This comprehensive bill serves to address an array of the issues facing children and families during these challenging economic times. The bill acknowledges the fact that the needs of families are complex and must be addressed concurrently to decrease the probability of families being propelled into greater poverty.

First, I would like to applaud the recognition that individuals seeking state-funded services should not be forced to navigate multiple levels of bureaucracy in order to be determined eligible for services being administered by the same state agency. CAHS fully supports Section 2.(b) of the proposed legislation that recommends (1) a single-point-of-entry procedure for state-funded programs and services...and (2) the promotion of combined, on-line application and enrollment processes for programs that serve children or families.

Second, applicants of state-funded services are often required to submit and resubmit documentation based on shifts in the Departments' eligibility criteria. The burden on applicants that are already in stressful situations having to apply for services should be alleviated, at no additional cost to the state, by the actions recommended in Section 2(c), "within available appropriations, and in accordance with the provisions of federal law, a client-friendly and reasonable timeline within which applications shall not be required to be resubmitted if a family recently applied for services and changes in eligibility temporarily have altered the application process or program closed to applications and then reopened." For example, in the case of the child care subsidy program, Care4Kids, was abruptly opened in November of 2009 but required all, including those that had previously sent in applications and had been placed on a waitlist, to resubmit new applications.

In addition to the burdens being placed on applicants for services, in many cases, as in the case of the child care subsidy program, burdens are also being placed on the providers of early care and education. CAHS is in full support of Section 3(2) of this bill to ensure that providers are given timely—not less than sixty days after public notice--when there are anticipated changes in the program that would result in discontinuation of subsidies and/or when there are anticipated changes in the eligibility criteria. Especially during these financially taxing times when child care providers are struggling to keep their programs open, it is a reasonable ask for the Department of Social Services to give providers ample notice that they can plan accordingly for the prospective loss of income.

Last but certainly not least, the legislature budgeted \$103M in funds for FY10 to the child care subsidy program based on the demand for services, the trend of deficit spending in previous years, and the realization that low-income families need assistance in accessing reliable child care in order to work. Unfortunately, this decision is being undermined through the creation of forced lapses in spending by the Department of Social Services limiting enrollment in the program at will. The program was abruptly closed in May of 2009 with restrictions in eligibility that resulted in some families being bumped from the program when they experienced small increased in income. As a result, enrollment in the program plummeted to the extent where the Department has now opened the program from November of 2009 through June 2010 in hopes of reaching the maintenance of effort spending required by federal guidelines in order for the state to retain child care stimulus funding. The funding originally budgeted by the legislature should be, "strictly and fully utilized for child care purposes that enable parents to work and children to thrive," as outline in the bill because there still exists an exasperating need for assistance in accessing reliable child care in order for families to work and/or seek employment.

CAHS supports the overall intent of H.B.5360 with specific commitment to the sections outlined in this testimony. We are an organization that has been working for 100 years to combat poverty and create opportunities for children and families. The recommendations outlined are in full alignment with that mission, and we trust that the legislature will recognize that these recommendations are in alignment with the mission of the state.

For more information: Sherry Linton (860)-951-2212 ext. 233, slinton@cahs.org